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Administrators' Unintentional Sensegiving and System Reform Outcomes

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Abstract: One popular diagnosis for the problem of inequitable educational opportunities is the need for schools and schooling systems to undergo systemic change. While research shows that leadership support is essential for implementing system reforms, critical questions remain about how leaders help shift other's understandings and practices. Employing the theory of sensegiving, this longitudinal, multiple-case study examines how administrators help teachers and other administrators make sense of a system reform during the first two years of implementation. I found that administrator's unintentional sensegiving complicated others' understandings of the new system reform, which complicated implementation. Based on these findings, I introduce the concept of *unintentional sensegiving* to theorize how leaders can give sense in ways they do not intend, yet have large impacts on how others understand and respond to a reform. Before championing a system reform, leaders deserve opportunities to (a) become familiar with the details of that reform and system reforms in general; (b) carefully study their existing systems, including their local contexts, and consider what dynamics might be created when they implement the new reform; (c) explore how their existing systems could shift to match the design of the system reform; and (d) practice drawing on their wells of knowledge to help others shift their understandings about their practice.

Keywords: education policy; system reform; instructional coordination and coherence; implementation; sensegiving; knowledge development; leadership preparation

***Sensegiving* no intencionalidad de los administradores y los resultados de la reforma del sistema**

Resumen: Un diagnóstico popular para el problema de oportunidades educativas injustas es la necesidad de escuelas y sistemas de enseñanza que sufren cambios sistémicos.

Aunque las investigaciones demuestran que el apoyo al liderazgo es esencial para implementar las reformas del sistema, todavía hay cuestiones cruciales sobre cómo los líderes ayudan a cambiar el entendimiento y las prácticas de los demás. Usando la teoría de *sensegiving*, el estudio longitudinal de varios casos examina cómo los administradores ayudan a los profesores y otros administradores a comprender la reforma del sistema durante los dos primeros años de implementación. Descubrí que el *sensegiving* no intencional de los administradores complicó la comprensión de los demás sobre la nueva reforma del sistema, lo que complicó la implementación. Con base en estos resultados, presento el concepto de *sensegiving* no intencional para teorizar cómo los líderes pueden dar sentido de maneras que no pretenden, pero aún tener grandes impactos sobre cómo los demás entienden y responden a una reforma. Antes de defender una reforma del sistema, los líderes merecen oportunidades para (a) familiarizarse con los detalles de esa reforma y reformas del sistema en general; (b) estudiar cuidadosamente sus sistemas existentes, incluyendo sus contextos locales, y considerar qué dinámicas pueden crearse cuando implementan la nueva reforma; (c) explorar cómo los sistemas existentes podrían cambiar para adaptarse al proyecto de reforma del sistema; y (d) practicar el diseño de conocimiento para ayudar a otros a cambiar sus entendimientos sobre su práctica.

Palabras-clave: política educativa; reforma del sistema; coordinación instruccional y coherencia; aplicación; *sensegiving*; la construcción de sentido; desarrollo de conocimiento; preparación de liderazgo

***Sensegiving* não intencional dos administradores e resultados da reforma do sistema**

Resumo: Um diagnóstico popular para o problema de oportunidades educacionais injustas é a necessidade de escolas e sistemas de ensino sofrerem mudanças sistêmicas. Embora as pesquisas mostrem que o apoio à liderança é essencial para implementar as reformas do sistema, ainda há questões cruciais sobre como os líderes ajudam a mudar o entendimento e as práticas dos outros. Empregando a teoria do *sensegiving*, esse estudo longitudinal de vários casos examina como os administradores ajudam os professores e outros administradores a compreenderem a reforma do sistema durante os dois primeiros anos de implementação. Descubri que *sensegiving* não intencional dos administradores complicou a compreensão dos outros sobre a nova reforma do sistema, o que complicou a implementação. Com base nesses resultados, apresento o conceito de *sensegiving* não intencional para teorizar como os líderes podem dar sentido de maneiras que não pretendem, mas ainda assim ter grandes impactos sobre como os outros entendem e respondem a uma reforma. Antes de defender uma reforma do sistema, os líderes merecem oportunidades para (a) familiarizar-se com os detalhes dessa reforma e reformas do sistema em geral; (b) estudar cuidadosamente seus sistemas existentes, incluindo seus contextos locais, e considerar quais dinâmicas podem ser criadas quando elas implementam a nova reforma; (c) explorar como os sistemas existentes poderiam mudar para se adequar ao

projeto de reforma do sistema; e (d) praticar o desenho de conhecimento para ajudar os outros a mudarem seus entendimentos sobre sua prática. **Palavras-chave:** política educacional; reforma do sistema; coordenação instrucional e coerência; implementação; *sensegiving*; desenvolvimento de conhecimento; preparação de liderança

Administrators' Unintentional Sensegiving and System Reform Outcomes

One popular diagnosis for the problem of inequitable educational opportunities is the need for schools and schooling systems to undergo systemic change (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Cobb, Jackson, Henrick, Smith, & MIST Project, 2018; Cohen, Peurach, Glazer, Gates, & Goldin, 2014; Daly & Finnigan, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Instead of targeting individual or subgroups of children, policymakers and educators could focus on schools, districts, and the institution of public schooling as systems that require structural and cultural change. The theory of action in instructional system reforms asserts that quality increases when elements of instruction—e.g., standards, curriculum, materials, professional learning, instructional strategies, assessments—are coordinated and coherent (Bryk et al., 2010; Cohen & Ball, 1999; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Research demonstrates that instructional coordination is associated with higher student achievement (Bryk et al., 2010; Rowan, Camburn, & Barnes, 2004), and Title I funds are often used to purchase and implement more equitable system reforms (Rowan et al., 2004). Since the 1980s and 1990s, system reforms, such as standards-based (a.k.a. systemic), whole school (e.g., comprehensive school reforms), and comprehensive large-scale reforms, continue to generate enthusiasm in the promise of shifting the existing systems that educate U.S. children (Bryk et al., 2010; Daly & Finnigan, 2016; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Mascal, 2002).

While system reforms aim to ameliorate inequitable educational opportunities, we're still learning what promise this theory of action holds (Cohen et al., 2014; Daly & Finnigan, 2016; Peurach, 2011). What does it take to shift our existing schooling systems towards ideal, coordinated and coherent ones that can adeptly manage daily instruction that equitably educates all students? Further, is it possible to change fundamental understandings about practice, particularly when practitioners will continue to work within a network of education, business, and government organizations that struggle to support coordinated and coherent instruction?

System reforms pose a novel challenge for policymakers and educators mainly because they aim to coordinate often disparate parts of an existing system so that the whole system is more responsive to students' needs. System reforms aim to change how educators perform instruction or schooling by requiring teachers and administrators to collaborate closely with others they were not trained to work with (e.g., teachers in other programs or grade levels) to bring coherence to children's daily learning opportunities through aligning their separate daily practices. In addition to transforming their knowledge and beliefs about instruction, culture, and behavior, teachers and administrators are being asked to enact a type of collective practice that produces improved learning and schooling opportunities for all kids. This would be a challenging task amid stable political and financial conditions. It is even more arduous when situated in contentious times where local control, equity, accountability, and other policies and pressures simultaneously press educators for results.

District and school leaders are key contributors to implementing and sustaining system reforms (Aladjem et al., 2006; Herrmann, 2006; Newmann et al., 2001; Rowan et al., 2004). When leaders champion such reforms, allocate appropriate resources, and provide stable political and financial environments, they help create a context that allows teachers, administrators, and even

external partners, to work together over time. These practices help ensure that a reform's new ways of coordinating instruction become part of the schools' normative culture.

However, institutionalizing new ways of working also requires shifts in participants' cultural-cognitive understandings, and these shifts are the most difficult aspects of practice to change (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott & Davis, 2007). Despite research on the roles that local leaders play in system reforms (Aladjem et al., 2006; Herrmann, 2006; Newmann et al., 2001; Rowan et al., 2004), critical questions remain about how leaders can help change what daily instruction looks like (Bridich, 2015). Such key questions include: how does a leader help shift others' understandings and practices to meet the goals of an ambitious, system-wide reform in a context where educators wrestle to manage multiple, often conflicting policy demands; and what knowledge and skills do leaders need to successfully help others shift?

This paper examines what knowledge administrators need to implement and sustain coherent instructional systems. To understand how leaders help change others' cultural-cognitive understandings, I employ the theory of sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) from organizational studies, which examines how leaders strategically shape others' sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). I designed a longitudinal multiple-case study to examine administrators' work in two schools within the same district during their first two years of implementing Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS, a.k.a. Response to Intervention, or RtI), a prevalent system reform. I then observed whether and how administrators' sensegiving influenced others' sensemaking, providing a rare opportunity to study systemic processes across multiple organizational levels. Sensegiving draws on existing knowledge. The findings indicate that leaders often did not have detailed knowledge of how MTSS proposes parts of a system should fit together nor how parts of their existing system already fit together, in order to accurately give sense to others. Moreover, the system reform effort came in tension with accountability and teacher evaluation policies, creating a challenging context that administrators were not prepared to encounter or manage.

To explain, I introduce the theoretical phenomenon of *unintentional sensegiving*. Unintentional sensegiving explains how leaders' existing knowledge can cause them to give sense in unintended ways that affect how others understand and respond to change efforts. By conducting a cross-level examination of systemic processes, I am able to provide a new insight on how administrators can influence teachers' understandings and implementation of system reform policies. Thus, I offer an understanding of the micro processes involved in changing cultural-cognitive understandings and practice in response to system reform policies. I then discuss how leadership preparation programs and in-service training can develop the knowledge and skills required for productive sensegiving. I also discuss the implications of sensegiving for policy implementation and how it can be leveraged in future system reform efforts.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I draw together research from both organizational studies and education to understand how leaders can help shift others' understandings and practices to accomplish a system reform. First, I define the theoretical construct of sensegiving and describe its role in implementation. I then discuss what leaders would ideally know to accurately give sense during system reform efforts.

Sensegiving and its Role in Implementation

Fundamentally changing people's practice requires changing the mental maps or frameworks that they use to guide their actions—what institutional theorists call cultural-cognitive understandings (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott & Davis, 2007). Cultural-cognitive understandings

are the culturally supported, taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions that people use to shape their actions. Operating as mental maps and frameworks, cultural-cognitive understandings guide people's sensemaking processes when they encounter novel, confusing, or unexpected situations, such as a new system reform (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). Because cultural-cognitive understandings are deeply rooted, they are considered the most difficult aspect of practice to change (Scott & Davis, 2007). Yet, to fundamentally change practice, people might need to consider the underlying beliefs and assumptions that govern their current practice. In other words, if educators seek to change their practice (such as classroom instruction or the management of instruction), they may need to change the cultural-cognitive understandings that direct their practice.

Leaders can play a key role in helping others shift their cultural-cognitive understandings through a process that organizational scholars call *sensegiving*. For instance, when educators encounter and try to make sense of a novel system reform, leaders can provide meaning to and resolve conflicts concerning the design of the reform to help guide people's sensemaking processes as they learn the reform (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Thus, sensegiving shapes the resource—the well of knowledge—that people draw on when they try to make sense of the new reform and how it bears on their and others' responsibilities. In their seminal study, Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) define sensegiving as “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (p. 442). Gioia and Chittipeddi describe how a new university president strategically engaged his direct reports and, later, a growing number of constituents in his vision for change. His intentional messaging shaped others' sensemaking to reflect his vision. In turn, these new understandings guided people to engage with each other and how they perform their work in a manner aligned with his vision. As a result, the organization made significant strides towards implementing the president's strategic change efforts.

Sensegiving helps us understand how leaders' actions can contribute to altering the mental maps people use to understand their and others' work (Foldy, Goldman, & Ospina, 2008; Maitlis, 2005; Smith, Plowman, & Duchon, 2010). For example, Foldy et al. (2008) identify sensegiving strategies that leaders might use to produce five types of sensegiving outcomes that are changes to cultural-cognitive understandings. These “cognitive shifts” are: (1) changes in how the problem is viewed, (2) changes in how a solution is viewed, (3) changes in how a constituency views itself, (4) changes in how parts of a constituency view other parts, and (5) changes in how others view the constituency. While implementing a system reform, leaders might prioritize shifting how parts of their constituencies see each other (e.g., how general education teachers see Title I and special education teachers, and vice versa) and focus less on how outsiders view teachers, although managing the environment will also be an important ongoing task (Cohen et al., 2014).

Sensegiving occurs through verbal communication, activities, symbols, and symbolic action (Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Maitlis, 2005; Smith et al., 2010). Thus, sensegiving is accomplished through what people say as well as what they do. For example, Orlikowski, Yates, Okamura, and Fujimoto (1995) described how company leaders slowly modified features of a new system-wide technology to carefully shape employees' cultural-cognitive understandings and use over time. Their strategic, non-verbal actions resulted in the full integration of the new technology.

Sensegiving is performed by people other than formal organizational leaders (Foldy et al., 2008; Maitlis, 2005), such as direct reports or external partners in the change effort. Thus, leaders should carefully consider the multiple messages organizational members will receive about instruction, and how they can help their members make sense of the messages in a manner that helps members shift their practices (Coburn, 2005). Maitlis (2005) found that when formal leaders and other organizational members work together to create a single account of an issue and possible

solutions, their sensegiving can create a guided sensemaking process, leading to consistent and unified change efforts. Conversely, those who do not work together send multiple messages that create fragmented, restricted, or minimal sensemaking processes, which can lead to limited or disjointed change efforts.

While sensegiving is not yet a concept used in PreK-12 education research, a small but growing body of literature discusses how messages from education leaders can shape teachers' sensemaking (Brezicha, Bergmark, & Mitra, 2015; Carlson & Patterson, 2015; Coburn, 2005; Matsumura & Wang, 2014; Park, Daly, & Guerra, 2013; Spillane et al., 2002). For instance, Spillane et al. (2002) find that leaders' understandings of and reactions to accountability policies can shape how their teachers respond to said policies. Coburn (2005) highlights how leaders can shape teachers' sensemaking of new reading policies through: (a) shaping access to policy ideas; (b) shaping how people understand and interpret new policies and their implications; and (c) shaping the conditions of teachers' learning opportunities.

Sensegiving, itself, draws on the sensegiver's existing knowledge, often embedded in cultural-cognitive understandings formed during prior sensemaking processes (Rouleau, 2005; Spillane, 1998; Spillane et al., 2002). In other words, shaping others' wells of knowledge requires drawing on the sensegiver's well of knowledge. What leaders know determines how well they can give sense. For example, Spillane et al. (2002) found that school leaders' actions were shaped by their sensemaking of accountability policies. Each administrator in the study understood the same policies differently and subsequently shaped teachers' understandings and actions differently. Thus, if we aim to help teachers and other educators shift their understandings and practices to meet the goals of an ambitious system reform, we should concern ourselves with their leaders' wells of knowledge.

Leaders' Wells of Knowledge for System Reforms

Because sensegiving draws on an individual's well of knowledge (Rouleau, 2005; Spillane, 1998; Spillane et al., 2002), leaders' pre-existing knowledge of system reforms will affect how adeptly they can help others make sense of their change effort. The more novel a reform is to a leader, the less knowledge the leader will have to draw from as they help others change their practices.

For this reason, leading system reforms might pose particular challenges. To begin, leading the construction and management of coordinated instructional systems could be novel to many leaders. They may not have the pre-existing knowledge and skills to accomplish this task. The principle of shared, common understandings around curriculum and curricular tools is often lacking in schools and school systems (Cohen et al., 2014). Yet system reforms require leaders to understand how parts of a system (e.g., general education, Title I/At Risk, and special education) can better coordinate, including how a system reform is embedded in curricular materials or other instructional guidance. MTSS, for instance, involves teachers and administrators sharing knowledge of a single curriculum, suite of assessments, curricular materials, and strategies so they can have rich, in-depth conversations about students' learning needs and how they will jointly serve those needs (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012; Vaughn, Denton, & Fletcher, 2010). Thus, leaders require opportunities to learn about the design of the particular system reform they will champion, as well as how to lead system reforms in general.

Such a well of knowledge is especially complex because each school or district is a unique, existing social system that functions in specific ways. Each social system is also located in a unique local context that is governed by particular policies, funding streams, politics, expectations about professional practice, and students' ever-changing needs. Sensemaking is a sociocultural process, as well as a cognitive one (Coburn, 2001; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). Teachers and administrators manage multiple, and sometimes conflicting, messages about their practices, and have

existing cultural-cognitive understandings that already govern those practices. Giving sense in such complex conditions is challenging and requires administrators to know their own systems well (Bredeson, Klar, & Johansson, 2011; Brezicha et al., 2015; Stein & Nelson, 2003). Thus, leaders deserve opportunities to study their existing systems and what dynamics the system reform will create in the local context.

Further, many instructional reforms involve a few relatively tightly knit and familiar areas of a system, such as an elementary ELA curricular adoption and its accompanying professional development. However, system reforms require that leaders know how to coordinate multiple, often disparate, areas of a system, and how to change the function of each area while carefully attending to how these changes generate alterations in other areas. The broader the system reform, the more dynamics amongst multiple moving parts need to be juggled, attended to, coordinated, and made coherent. More importantly, adding moving parts means considering how additional people from diverse departments will make sense of and fold in the proposed changes to their work. Subgroups of actors who are guided by different spheres of responsibilities and funding streams (e.g., general education, Title I/At-Risk, English as a Second Language, special education) and who are unused to working together make this particularly challenging. For instance, teachers are typically not trained, incentivized, or supported in attending to and improving collective practice (Bryk et al., 2010; Cohen, 2011). Consequently, they face difficulties in developing collective understandings and enacting the sort of coordinated instruction that system reforms aim to foster (Cohen et al., 2014; Newmann et al., 2001; Rowan, Correnti, Miller, & Camburn, 2009). If the existing system is not already well coordinated, leaders will have few existing understandings and practices to help them solve implementation issues. Thus, leaders deserve opportunities to study how their existing systems could shift to match the design of the system reform, and what it might take to make those shifts.

Finally, because many leaders will not have prior experiences with leading a particular or any system reform in their particular social systems and local contexts, they might lack prior experiences with giving sense to a system reform prior to leading their change efforts. They deserve opportunities to practice drawing on their wells of knowledge to help others shift their cultural-cognitive understandings about their instructional practices, such as how their new curricular materials are designed to help them actualize the system reform or how they can coordinate their practice with others in their social system.

While the existing literature investigates how sensegiving can shift people's cultural-cognitive understandings and actions toward desired implementation outcomes, it does not explore sensegiving in complex, education system reforms. Nor does it explore the knowledge base and learning opportunities leaders might need to give sense in ways that beget the desired systemic changes. This study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What was the nature of administrators' sensegiving during their implementation of a system reform?
- 2) How did administrators' sensegiving shape implementation?

Method

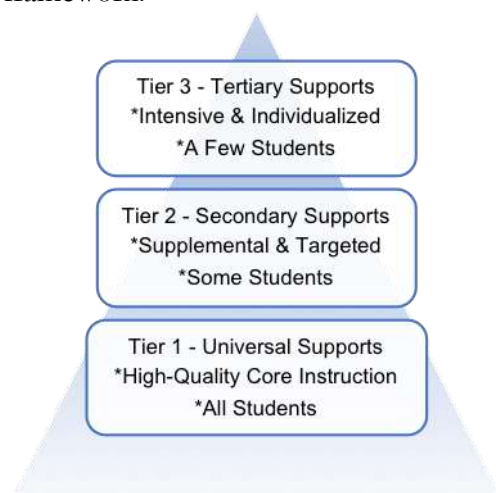
This longitudinal, multiple-case study (Yin, 2009) examines the work of four district and school administrators in two elementary schools within a rural district during the first two years of implementing MTSS. By including two school sites, I was able to compare the implementation dynamics between two different social systems of work (i.e., networks of educators situated in particular contexts). Studying sensegiving requires a close analysis of the social process of meaning making. Thus, I designed this study to engage in close observation and inquiry of two social systems,

affording a rare opportunity to observe systemic processes within and across organizational levels and boundaries. To control for differing policy and demographic variables that might confound our understandings of administrators' sensegiving and policy implementation, two schools—Fairview and Riverside¹—were chosen from the same district. Fairview and Riverside are governed by the same district policies. Further, the schools serve similar student populations. During the study, 52% of the students at Fairview qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The majority of the students' parents or guardians identified them as White (88%), with the rest identified as Hispanic, two or more races, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaskan, respectively. At Riverside, 50% of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The majority was identified as White (87%), with the rest identified as Hispanic, two or more races, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaskan, respectively. None of the students at either school were classified as English Language Learners.

In this study, the new system reform that administrators and teachers strove to implement was MTSS. To support its implementation, the district purchased Reading Street, a reading program with MTSS embedded in its design, to help provide infrastructure that would support their teachers and administrators as they worked towards shifting their practices. Below, I describe the changes in practice that MTSS demands as a system reform and how Reading Street was designed to support these changes. I illustrate the sensegiving that leaders must undertake to help teachers and other administrators implement this particular system reform.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

MTSS is a current version of Response to Intervention (RtI), which traditionally served as a special education framework for identifying and supporting students' needs. Expanding on RtI, the MTSS framework emphasizes the role the whole school plays in instruction; in other words, the systemic nature of instruction (Baker, Fien, & Baker, 2010; National Center for Learning Disabilities, n.d.)². MTSS places a heavy emphasis on strengthening general education along with developing equitable procedures for identifying students who need additional academic support. The change in name illustrates the shift in focus from interventions to a school-wide instructional system. Figure 1 is a common depiction of the framework.



¹ Names of organizations and individuals are pseudonyms.

² The MTSS framework is also used for providing behavioral or social emotional supports. This study focuses on the implementation of a school- and district-wide reading system. Consequently, the rest of the manuscript will focus on instruction.

Figure 1. The MTSS framework, representing all students and their fluid movement through tiers.

A main principle of the MTSS framework is that students move fluidly through the tiers of support (Fuchs et al., 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010). Any student may need additional supports at any time to master any aspect of the curriculum. For instance, a student who had some challenges learning short vowel sounds may suddenly struggle with long vowels. Her general education teacher would immediately provide extra support (Tier 2), maybe in the form of small group instruction, taught by the general education teacher or by another teacher in an adjacent program, such as Title I, ESL, or even special education. If the student continued to struggle, she would immediately receive more intensive, targeted support (Tier 3), again provided by her general education or another teacher. Meanwhile, she would still receive the ongoing Tier 1 instruction provided to all students. Further, she would move out of Tiers 2 or 3 as soon as she mastered the long vowel skills that originally triggered the additional support. This principle is meant to shift teachers' and administrators' understandings of how to organize whole and small group instruction, how to formatively assess students' progress, and how to fluidly coordinate instruction with other teachers within and across grades and programs (e.g., general education, Title I/At-Risk, ESL, special education) to best support students' ever-changing learning needs.

To support such a fluid instructional system, teachers and administrators need curriculum, materials, strategies, and assessments that are aligned and coordinated across tiers of support. This alignment and coordination is meant to span across a school year as well as across programming and grade levels to effect an instructional system that supports students throughout their tenure. Instructional alignment and coordination of this breadth requires teachers to share common understandings of the curriculum and to coordinate their enactments of curricular materials and assessments. Thus, in addition to their individual responsibilities, in the MTSS framework, teachers within and across grades and programs constantly work together to study individual students' learning needs, curricular materials, and instructional strategies so they can generate rich, in-depth conversations about students' needs and how they will jointly serve those needs.

Reading Street. To support teachers and administrators with implementing MTSS, the district adopted a new elementary reading program to provide some infrastructure: Reading Street Common Core 2013, published by Pearson. MTSS was a key feature of Reading Street's design. The reading program supports MTSS by tightly coordinating multiple elements of an instructional system—a common K-5 curriculum, a suite of tiered curricular materials, and a suite of tiered assessments. The program's pacing guide details how Reading Street builds knowledge and skills across weeks and units in a year and across grade levels, while spiraling review throughout. In addition to whole class Tier 1 lessons, the program provides a wealth of materials and strategies to support Tier 2 instruction that aligns with specific Tier 1 lessons. The program also includes a suite of assessments to help support rapid cycles of formative assessment. Further, Pearson developed a supplementary intervention program, My Sidewalks, for Tier 3 instruction that aligns with the content in Tiers 1 and 2. My Sidewalks contains its own set of materials and assessments to continually diagnose and monitor students' progress.

Data Collection

I collected data from August 2012 to June 2014. During Year 1, I visited each school approximately every five weeks for five days, which provided a consistent sampling of dialogue and instruction during the first year when, arguably, administrators and teachers would wrestle the most with how to implement MTSS. During Year 2, I visited each school in the fall and spring for two

weeks each time, and I conducted mid-year phone interviews. In addition, throughout the year, I interviewed some participants by phone after attending key events.

I conducted a total of nine semi-structured interviews with the superintendent and district curriculum director, and 20 semi-structured interviews with each principal (see Appendices A and B for excerpts from Year 1 Spring protocols). Interviews lasted between 60 to 180 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. In addition, I shadowed each principal twice to learn how they understood and enacted their roles and responsibilities in this system reform effort. I observed 34 district- and school-level meetings where staff discussed reading instruction, such as staff meetings, grade-level meetings, and MTSS Team meetings. I also observed 19 MTSS and Reading Street trainings, documenting these using open-ended field notes. Additionally, I collected relevant artifacts (see Table 1 for distribution of interviews and observations).

From each school, I recruited two general education teachers per grade level to observe the degree of instructional coordination within and across grades, and one Title I and one special education teacher to observe coordination across programs. Three participating Fairview teachers retired at the end of Year 1. I then recruited three new teachers who held the same positions as the retired teachers. I directly observed and inquired about their understandings and enactments of reading instruction, specifically areas where MTSS guided them to collaborate and coordinate with others (e.g., planning for Tier 2 or 3 instruction, studying assessment data). I took open-ended field notes during classroom observations, conducted semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C for excerpts from Year 1 Spring protocol), and collected relevant artifacts. In all, I conducted 52 interviews and 29 observations with nine Fairview teachers, and 66 interviews and 40 observations with eight Riverside teachers.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection to allow for the refinement of subsequent data collection procedures (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2009). I analyzed data deductively, to test existing theories, as well as inductively, to develop an explanatory frame.

My analysis focused first on how teachers and administrators attempted to enact school- or district-wide systems of reading instruction, as designed in the MTSS framework. I wrote analytic memos that addressed this focus during each round of data collection. When I began coding, I started with an inductive review of the analytic memos to identify emerging themes and to assign initial codes (Miles et al., 2013). One emerging theme was teachers' and administrators' confusion and frustration as they tried to make sense of multiple messages on how to best implement their schools' and district's system reform. I conducted a second round of coding that was deductive and

Table 1
Distribution of Interviews and Observations

Participant/Event	Year 1		Year 2	
	Interviews	Observations or Shadowing	Interviews	Observations or Shadowing
District				
Charles (Superintendent)	2	0	1	0
Cara (Curriculum Director)	3	0	3	0
District-Level Meetings	-	8	-	1
Fairview				
Kendall (Principal)	8	2	1	0
1 st grade Teacher A	4	3	3	1

1 st grade Teacher B	7	3	0	0
1 st grade Teacher C	1	0	3	2
2 nd grade Teacher A	7	3	0	0
2 nd grade Teacher B	4	3	0	0
2 nd grade Teacher C	1	0	3	2
2 nd grade Teacher D	0	0	3	2
Title I/At-Risk Teacher	6	3	3	2
Special Education Teacher	4	3	3	2
School-Level Meetings	-	8	-	2
Riverside				
Claire (Principal)	8	2	3	0
3 rd grade Teacher A	7	4	3	2
3 rd grade Teacher B	4	3	3	2
4 th grade Teacher A	6	3	3	2
4 th grade Teacher B	4	3	3	2
5 th grade Teacher A	5	4	3	2
5 th grade Teacher B	7	3	3	1
Title I/At-Risk Teacher	5	3	3	1
Special Education Teacher	4	3	3	2
School-Level Meetings	-	11	-	4
Trainings				
District MTSS Trainings	-	1	-	2
School MTSS Trainings	-	9	-	2
Reading Street Trainings	-	2	-	3

guided by the concept of sensegiving, which involved coding the analytic memos for the sources of confusion and frustration, such as Reading Street and My Sidewalks teachers' manuals, administrators, or other teachers. Preliminary findings indicated that administrators' messages carried greater weight than other sources of information during people's sensemaking processes because administrators have authority over teachers' and other administrators' employment. I used pattern matching (Yin, 2009) to better understand the sensegiving role of all sources, including administrators, in shaping people's understandings and practices around MTSS and instructional coordination (e.g., how to align teaching within and across grades and across programming). Next, I reviewed all observations, interviews, and artifacts to confirm my original triangulation of the data, seeking disconfirming evidence and refining the findings. The data indicated administrators' sensegiving did carry greater weight than other sources regarding how to implement MTSS. I checked the findings with participants who verified the findings resonated with their experiences (Miles et al., 2013). Finally, I inductively coded administrators' sensegiving to better understand the nature of their sensegiving, including the knowledge they drew on when they formed their messages to guide implementation. In addition to intentional sensegiving, administrators sent messages about implementation that they did not intend to send. These instances caused the greatest confusion and frustration. I grouped these instances into categories that describe the sensegiving that administrators performed.

Findings

Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) define sensegiving as “the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (p. 442). Consequently, sensegiving is typically described as intentional, strategic actions that leaders and others take to shape organizational outcomes. Yet, not all actions are intentional. Central office and school administrators in this study demonstrate that sensegiving can be unintentional. These administrators gave sense in ways they did not intend but that created far-reaching impacts on how others understood and responded to this system reform effort.

Administrators in this study performed three types of what I term *unintentional sensegiving*. I label the three types *passive*, *partial*, and *ambiguous*. Each is defined and illustrated below; from multiple examples in the data, I select two to illustrate each type of unintentional sensegiving. In each example, administrators’ unintentional sensegiving caused confusion and/or frustration, and contributed to variance in people’s understandings of the system reform they worked to implement.

Passive Sensegiving

When leaders are silent or defer to others, resulting in others shaping messages for them, they are unintentionally engaging in *passive* sensegiving. In the two examples below, the administrators were silent and deferred to others’ messages on how to implement Reading Street and MTSS, with the intention of letting those knowledgeable others guide teachers’ sensemaking. When administrators did speak, they reiterated what the knowledgeable others said. They did not know enough about (1) how Reading Street was designed to actualize MTSS; (2) how the reform design interacted with their existing systems and broader messages about program fidelity; and (3) in what ways their existing systems could shift to match the design, nor were they given sufficient opportunities to learn. In fact, these administrators learned alongside their teachers. As a result, they could not strategically give sense to their system reform effort beyond what others suggested. However, teachers needed administrators’ help with implementing Reading Street and MTSS within their unique social systems of work. Without help from their administrators, teachers were left to make their own sense of how to use Reading Street within their schools. In fact, each teacher or pair of teachers developed different understandings, and each chose different manners of enacting Reading Street. This resulted in a lack of instructional coordination within and across the two schools.

Passive Sensegiving: Example 1. When implementation began, the District Curriculum Director, Cara³, had nascent understandings of MTSS, Reading Street, and how the MTSS framework was built into Reading Street. Moreover, as implementation proceeded, her teachers and principals gained more knowledge while she did not have as many opportunities to learn. Understandably, Cara deferred to Pearson trainers, who said the MTSS framework would be actualized if they maintained the fidelity of the Reading Street program. Teachers were familiar with the idea of program fidelity from past implementation efforts, and they all agreed on its importance. The first trainer defined “fidelity” as teaching all lessons written each day in the teachers’ manual. Thus, Cara insisted this was what teachers needed to learn to do: “It’s all there for [the teachers]. It’s just getting used to doing it, and doing a 90-minute block, trying to fit it all in.” However, in later trainings, Pearson staff changed the definition of “fidelity.” For instance, at an administrators’ training, the trainer gave administrators a list of “Must-dos” for each week, which left off a number of activities from the teachers’ manual. The trainer said following this list would “maintain fidelity”

³ Again, names of organizations and individuals are pseudonyms.

to the program. When Cara and principals passed the list on to teachers, this caused a great deal of confusion. Later, another Pearson trainer said teachers only had to cover the “Targeted and Tested” content each day to maintain fidelity. Cara reiterated to teachers during that training, “...the Targeted and Tested are your minimum.”

During and after each training, Cara was silent or seemed to agree with each trainer. Thus, teachers and principals were unsure of what she thought fidelity meant and how they should accomplish any version of it, given their current bell schedules. Yet, because of her power over their jobs, her definition of fidelity mattered most. One teacher explained:

I've gotten mixed messages. The different trainers that we've had come in from Reading Street, from Pearson... We expressed concern to our curriculum director saying, "How—, the scheduling doesn't match this." And we really didn't get a response, so—yeah... how can I fairly be, objectively be evaluated that way? That's not fair.

Cara admitted her own frustration over how Pearson trainers complicated their change efforts: “The teacher trainings, because they've been done by different people, there have sometimes been mixed messages.”

Teachers and principals made multiple requests for Cara to make a district-wide decision on what she would accept as fidelity, but, afraid of misguiding them, she did not attempt to clarify Pearson trainers' sensegiving for her staff, nor did she help them troubleshoot their bell schedules. Her passive sensegiving unintentionally left her staff to guess her expectations. Teachers' sensemaking varied across classrooms. Some understood Cara's silence as an indication to ‘try to teach everything in the manual,’ while others thought they could make their own decisions because Cara did not know or would not find out. One principal said, “I guess if she's not going to give me a directive, I just need to make a directive... Sometimes it's just better to ask for forgiveness than for permission.”

Additionally, because of Cara's deference to the mixed messages from Pearson trainers, each principal gave sense to their teachers in different ways. Kendall, Fairview's principal, mandated her teachers teach all activities listed in the teachers' manual. Claire, however, buffered her teachers from what she perceived as ill-informed guidance. This resulted in varied sensemaking amongst Claire's teachers, depending on the sense they made of Cara's messages, which led to teachers using Reading Street in multiple ways.

Passive Sensegiving: Example 2. Similarly, Kendall's (Fairview's principal) lack of knowledge of Reading Street and how it served the MTSS frame limited her participation in solving implementation issues in her school, even though her teachers looked to her for guidance. In one example, teachers asked Kendall if they could read or have the Pearson software read sections of Reading Street assessments to students. Some children did not read at grade-level, and their scores reflected their decoding skills more than their vocabulary or comprehension skills. Teachers wanted to read sections of the assessments, but they also did not want to violate the fidelity of Reading Street or the MTSS framework, which was driven by data from these assessments. Kendall was uncertain and told her teachers she deferred to Cara. Cara was also uncertain and chose not to respond. Kendall and Cara's passive sensegiving allowed messages from other schools to shape teachers' sensemaking. One teacher described a visit to another school:

She's the [teacher] who said to us, “Oh, you're not reading the test? Well, we do ours on the computer, so we are.” So we came back and dialogued and we said our test scores are going to look worse than Mirror Lake's. We haven't, I don't believe, have gotten a clear answer from our curriculum director as to what [she] wants.

Absent clear messages from their administrators, Fairview teachers made different choices, depending on the sense they made of guidance from other schools. Kendall expressed her frustration with the lack of coordination across classrooms; this violated a key principle of the MTSS framework. How could they use these data to drive building-wide instruction when the data spoke differently about students' needs? Yet, due to her lack of knowledge and experience with Reading Street and MTSS, Kendall did not feel comfortable guiding her teachers.

In these two examples, Kendall and Cara engaged in passive sensegiving because they intended to rely on more knowledgeable others to help guide the implementation of this system reform. They did not realize their staff needed them to help make sense of others' messages in light of their specific contexts. They also failed to understand that their deference and silence sent unintended messages that shaped principals' and teachers' understandings and actions towards an uneven implementation of MTSS.

Partial Sensegiving

Leaders engage in *partial* sensegiving when they unintentionally provide limited information that does not convey their full message. Consequently, they unintentionally send a partial message that does not convey their full point or meaning. The unintended message is the one that shapes others' sensemaking. In the examples below, administrators intentionally sent messages to their direct reports about how to use or manage Reading Street in service of MTSS. They were not silent, nor did they defer to others. They had clear guidance to give, and they communicated that guidance. Unfortunately, the messages they sent were not complete enough to ensure that all participants understood their intentions. The administrators did not know enough about (1) the design of MTSS and Reading Street; (2) the dynamics occurring amongst the reform, their existing systems, and broader accountability policies; and (3) how to communicate change efforts given these dynamics. Thus, their well-intentioned efforts amplified existing confusion, frustrations, and fears.

Partial Sensegiving: Example 1. The implementation of MTSS and Reading Street occurred during development of a new statewide teacher evaluation process. Teachers and administrators anxiously awaited any news on its progress. Cara unintentionally fueled existing fears and confusion by providing principals with a Reading Street walk-through checklist accompanied by limited explanation. Kendall said she initially thought the checklist was “daunting.” She stated that Cara told them it was a tool to help principals keep track of what they observed and to help them see the larger system at work. Kendall intended to use the checklist in that manner. Claire, Riverside's principal, said it came across as “all about compliance.” The walk-through form listed every activity in Reading Street, “...and you just circle ‘Yes, I saw it,’ or, ‘No, I didn’t see it.’” Claire feared this form would be used to evaluate teacher performance.

While Cara did not clarify her message, she made it clear she wanted principals to use the checklist. Since Kendall and Claire made sense of Cara's message in different ways, they again moderated the message differently for their respective faculty. Claire openly expressed her frustration to her teachers and refused to use the checklist. In her interview, she explained:

When I do a walk-through, it's not about compliance. It's about, ‘What feedback do you want? What feedback can I give?’... And how do you do that with the new evaluation? Because [the teachers] feel it is all about getting caught, and I'm trying to make sure it is not. But they are getting double messages when they get a walk-through form like that.

Kendall, however, decided to share the checklist with her teachers:

They kind of flipped out. So I promised them I would not use it until the second semester...I don't want to write anybody up for not doing Reading Street. They are all doing it, and they are all trying their best.

Kendall said she tried explaining it was just a tool for principals to help them see the building-wide MTSS system, "But the teachers didn't hear that," she stated. "What the teachers thought was that I was going to use that checklist to write their evaluations. And I wasn't going to do that."

Cara intended to help principals see and manage an instructional system, but her partial sensegiving was overwhelmed by stronger messages about accountability and evaluations. She did not see or understand the dynamics at work amongst the system reform, their existing social systems of work, and broader accountability policies. Nor did she know how to fully convey her intentions of using the checklist to help actualize their K–12 MTSS system, and not to evaluate teachers. The situation left teachers and principals simultaneously fearful and resentful of Cara.

Partial Sensegiving: Example 2. While attempting to realize a key principle of MTSS in her school, Kendall unintentionally gave the impression that she expected her teachers to do more work without additional support, further complicating their change efforts. During a staff meeting, a teacher raised a concern about the content of their Tier 2 supports. Recall that Tiers 2 and 3 provide additional supports to master a skill or concept above and beyond the main or core lesson that all students receive. This teacher pointed out that some Reading Street small group lessons did not target the skills students needed, as determined by diagnostic, benchmark assessments. Instead, the lessons retaught or expanded on skills and concepts introduced that week by Reading Street. The teacher argued that some students needed opportunities to master letters and sounds more than to master new content. Further, she argued using more targeted lessons was important for gathering data on what interventions teachers attempted in Tiers 2 and 3 before referring a student for comprehensive evaluation. If small group lessons did not teach the skills that benchmark assessments identified students needed, then Tier 2 efforts could not contribute to those data.

The rest of the staff agreed in principle. However, most teachers said they did not have time to teach both small group and targeted lessons, as they barely fit the small group lessons into their curriculum. Further, they could not exclude the small group lessons in their manuals because this might violate the fidelity of the program, and thus go against their curriculum director's directive, possibly affecting their evaluations.

Kendall agreed with the teacher who raised the concern and encouraged everyone to find a way to teach targeted lessons, which could be found in Reading Street's Response to Intervention (RtI) kit. She ended the conversation shortly afterwards, foreclosing an opportunity to discuss the issue further or to help her faculty brainstorm possible solutions. This gave teachers the sense that she required they figure out how to teach both small group and targeted lessons without additional support. One teacher exclaimed during her interview:

And when is that going to happen? It's easy to say, 'Oh, I should be using that kit.' Could you tell me, in my day, today, when I would have had time to do additional? I can't even get through what I've got, and you're telling me I have to do more? And individually with these students? I, here, that's what, AAAAAAAAAAAAA! I can't do it! There's only one of me... [laugh/crying] I'm trying. I'm thinking, 'What am I doing wrong?' I'm having more and more self-doubt.

Teachers provided varied responses to what they perceived as a directive. Some eliminated or thinned out Tier 1 and small group lessons to accommodate the RtI kit. Others asked Title I

teachers to cover RtI lessons instead of the My Sidewalks lessons they were supposed to cover. Some juggled all lessons, including the RtI kit, so that each lesson had equal opportunity to be cut or barely taught each week. The problem of responding to students' needs in a timely manner—a key principle of the MTSS framework—was unevenly addressed. Moreover, Tier 1 instruction was weakened in some classrooms.

Cara and Kendall's partial sensegiving led their direct reports to misunderstand their intended messages. Instead, teachers heard their administrators make unreasonable demands that the teachers would be held accountable for. Cara and Kendall intended to provide guidance that would help administrators and teachers serve children within the MTSS framework. Unfortunately, their own wells of knowledge were not deep enough to help them send clear and complete messages about their guidance.

Ambiguous Sensegiving

When leaders send vague or contradicting messages, they unintentionally engage in *ambiguous* sensegiving. This is in contrast to *partial* sensegiving, where messages are clear but unfinished. With *ambiguous* sensegiving, others may openly question the content of the intended message and struggle to use the elusive guidance as a resource for their own sensemaking. In the two examples below, administrators sent confusing, mixed messages that left teachers struggling to understand what they meant and what the consequences were for instruction. The administrators did not know enough about (1) the MTSS frame and how Reading Street served that frame; (2) the dynamics between the reform and their existing social systems of work; and (3) how to guide others' understandings.

Ambiguous Sensegiving: Example 1. While Claire saw many strengths with Reading Street, she also saw problems. She had few opportunities to learn how the program could function as their school's primary tool for tiered instruction. Instead, Claire saw Reading Street as a basic-level reading program, which was in contrast to what she viewed as good instruction: "It feels like a step backwards to me, because it's very basally." Her understanding of Reading Street conflicted with her intentions of establishing MTSS, which she believed would support good instruction.

Consequently, Claire's guidance to her teachers was a mix of establishing a building-wide reading system and experimenting with which components of Reading Street to use or discard. At a staff meeting, she described Reading Street's strengths, such as the K–5 scope and sequence that allowed teachers to collectively plan and analyze data. However, she also told teachers to view the first year of implementation as a pilot year. They would test the components of Reading Street and determine which proved useful enough to continue using for their students. Further, while she thought building-wide consistency was important, she asked teachers to only worry about consistency within their grade levels during the first year. She wanted each grade-level team to experiment with which components worked well for their students. This was in direct contrast to what Cara expected, and what Kendall mandated at Fairview.

At other meetings, Claire asked teachers to have a healthy skepticism of the program. During an interview, she also said that she would send a memo to her staff stating they should examine Reading Street through the lens of authentic reading instruction and cut anything that got in the way of children reading real books. Consequently, when a teacher asked if they could cut the small group instruction from Reading Street, she said, "Of course," without considering how that eliminated opportunities for Tier 2 instruction, a key principle of the MTSS frame.

Some teachers were grateful for the flexibility: "She has given us permission this year to use what we can." Other teachers were confused by her ambiguous messages. One teacher said:

I think [Claire] has been more—not forceful: “We’re doing Reading Street. That’s what you’re doing” ... End of discussion kind of thing. At the same time, out of the other side of her mouth, she’ll say, ‘Well, yeah, but you have the freedom to do this.’

Claire’s mixed messages resulted in a variety of enactments of Reading Street, which made implementing MTSS increasingly difficult because teachers’ various methods complicated opportunities to collaborate across programming and grades. In fact, as the year progressed, more teachers began individually deciding how to modify Reading Street, which further complicated collaboration within and across grade levels and programming.

Additionally, Title I and special education teachers had a difficult time providing students with Tiers 2 and 3 instruction through using My Sidewalks, because general education teachers no longer taught the corresponding weekly lessons in Reading Street. My Sidewalks was designed to align with Reading Street week by week. However, students pulled out during designated tiered instruction periods had different general education teachers. Title I and special education teachers could not cover multiple weeks of My Sidewalks lessons within one tiered session. To manage students’ needs, given the master calendar and general education teachers’ instructional choices, Title I and special education teachers operated separate instructional systems from general education teachers, which contradicts a key principle of MTSS.

In her effort to create a coordinated instructional system, Claire unintentionally sent ambiguous messages that led to a lack of instructional coordination and coherence. Claire realized this by the end of the first year of implementation. However, she did not have the knowledge or experience to draw upon to reshape her messages and help redirect teachers’ instructional decision-making, nor was she provided with sufficient professional development to help her manage the implementation of a novel system reform. Thus, the difficulties teachers faced with collaborating were not addressed, and reading instruction remained uncoordinated across Riverside classrooms throughout the second year of implementation.

Ambiguous Sensegiving: Example 2. While trying to maintain district-wide instructional coordination, Charles, the superintendent, unintentionally gave the sense that teachers could deviate from Reading Street. He attended a Riverside staff meeting to discuss an unrelated topic and ended up participating in a discussion about how to use Reading Street. One teacher expressed that by using Reading Street as instructed by Pearson trainers and Cara, she was not providing high-quality reading instruction for her students. The following conversation ensued:

Charles: We need fidelity. This isn’t so that you don’t have good teaching. You can still do project based learning.

Teacher: No, we can’t. We’re not allowed.

Charles: [Teacher], you know what good teaching is. I trust that you know what good teaching is. We need to follow the program with fidelity. It doesn’t mean you can’t still do project based learning.

Teacher: Well, I’m getting evaluated. [Cara] can come in at whatever time she wants and she can write up that I’m not following the curriculum, and you could get rid of me.

Charles: No, she can’t.

Technically, Claire confirmed later, Cara could dismiss this teacher for not following the district-mandated curriculum. Thus, in this interaction, Charles both contradicted his curriculum director and delivered his own set of ambiguous messages about teaching Reading Street with fidelity and instructing a project based unit. As another teacher recalled:

I think when [Teacher] was told that she could do her project-based unit, it was kinda like, 'Alright, you're giving me permission, too?' [She laughs] [Cara] was very clear. We teach Reading Street, Reading Street only. That will be the same thing she keeps saying. [Charles] is the one who said, 'I have never said you cannot do best practice.' 'Well what does that mean [Charles]?' 'You know what that means because you know what best practice is.' 'Okay, [Charles], [laughs] are you overriding [Cara] or not?' So it does have that little, 'I'm not sure.'

Another teacher was concerned about how Charles's ambiguous messages would be interpreted by other teachers, "You know, that's opening a Pandora's box. Now other people know that this is happening. And so, in their room, it makes me wonder, what are they not doing now? It's undermining everything."

Charles intended to help shape a coordinated instructional system by saying teachers could accomplish both best practices and fidelity to Reading Street. However, because he was not provided with opportunities to learn how to manage the implementation of a novel system reform, he did not fully understand the MTSS framework, the design of Reading Street, or what his district's existing instructional system looked like. Thus, he unintentionally gave the sense that teachers could deviate from Reading Street in order to engage in best practices. In addition to sending ambiguous messages, he contradicted another central office leader who sent strong messages to teachers that they had to use Reading Street with fidelity. As a consequence, Riverside teachers began to use the components of Reading Street even more variably than before, including not using Reading Street at all. It became more difficult for grade level teams to coordinate their work, and even more difficult for Title I and special education teachers to coordinate with general education teachers.

These four well-intentioned administrators did not have adequate opportunities to develop their wells of knowledge before they led the implementation of MTSS. Further, no knowledgeable expert was present to provide on-site learning opportunities or to help problem solve when issues arose. Instead, these administrators struggled independently for two years to construct a Multi-Tiered System of Support, to manage their teachers' learning opportunities, and to best serve their students. They deserved opportunities to (1) learn how Reading Street served the MTSS frame; (2) study the dynamics amongst the system reform, other policies, and their existing systems; and (3) consider how to shift their existing systems.

Discussion

Unlike the deliberate and strategic actions taken by leaders in the existing sensegiving literature, leaders can also give sense in unintended ways that produce large impacts on how others understand and respond to change efforts—what I have termed *unintentional sensegiving*. Unintentional sensegiving comes in multiple forms, and this study highlights three:

- Passive: deferring to others, staying silent
- Partial: providing partial information
- Ambiguous: sending vague or inconsistent messages

Research on sensegiving has not attended to the phenomenon of unintentional sensegiving and its consequences for organizational outcomes. However this study reveals the prevalence of unintentional sensegiving, highlights its nuance, and expands our understanding of sensegiving and organizational outcomes in general. In this study, administrators' unintentional sensegiving, in

interaction with other messages, created variance in people's cultural-cognitive understandings and enactments of a system reform, contributing to the uneven implementation of MTSS in their schools and district. While multiple actors always perform sensegiving, central office and school administrators' sensegiving carries more weight because of their power over people's employment. Thus, if we aim to help practitioners shift the deeply rooted cultural-cognitive understandings that guide their practice, we must pay attention to their leaders' wells of knowledge.

This study also deepens our understandings of system reform policies, both their complexity and the supports required to actualize them. I designed this study to allow me to observe participants in multiple settings throughout their social systems, spanning across organizational levels and boundaries. Because of this study design, I was able to reveal the following insights about system reform policies and implementation. System reforms pose particular challenges because of their complexity, the complexity of existing systems that they are integrated into, and the dynamics with the local policy context. Before administrators and other leaders attempt to guide a system reform, they deserve more opportunities to (1) become familiar with the details of the specific reform and system reforms in general; (2) carefully study their existing social system, including its local context, and consider what dynamics might be created when they implement the new reform; (3) explore how their existing systems could shift to match the design of the system reform; and (4) practice drawing on their wells of knowledge to help others shift their cultural-cognitive understandings about their instructional practice, such as how new curricular materials can help them actualize the system reform or how they can coordinate their practice with others in their social systems. Because the leaders in this study did not have enough systems knowledge to draw on, they were not prepared to lead wholly effective and successful systemic change and provide others with appropriate supports. In their well-intended attempts, they unintentionally gave sense in ways that resulted in varied and conflicting sensemaking across the district. These varied understandings complicated the construction of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports and even fractured existing instructional coordination.

This study also adds to our knowledge of the social relationships amongst central office administrators, principals, and teachers by tracing how sensegiving and sensemaking form a social, communication network, and how this network shapes implementation. These social relationships are the connective pathways along which complex information and resources can travel. Due to my opportunities to interview and observe administrators and teachers across multiple settings during the first two years of implementation, I was privy to administrators' honest thoughts, struggles, decision-making, and messaging; and the honest and stark commentary from both teachers and administrators as they experienced misinformation and confusion while attempting to actualize MTSS. I detail how administrators' unintentional sensegiving traveled the social systems' communication pathways and contributed to uneven understandings and enactments of a new system reform.

Implications for Leadership Development

The findings contribute to our field's evolving understandings of professional leadership development, both in preparation programs and in-service training. The richer and more frequent professional development we offer to leaders, the deeper their wells of knowledge. In other words, in addition to off-site and periodic trainings, leaders need ongoing and on-site opportunities to learn with each other that are embedded in their daily practice. Because productive sensegiving around system reforms relies on detailed knowledge of an existing system in an existing complex local context, leaders need opportunities to learn within their daily practice, with each other, and ideally with knowledgeable others. Off-site and periodic trainings, while useful for building theoretical knowledge of MTSS, were not enough to construct the practical knowledge and skills the administrators in this study needed to shift their particular social systems of work. Indeed, establishing a new instructional system requires learning how to coordinate or rearrange pieces of a particular current system that lives within a particular political and financial reality. This means learning while practicing.

Interveners—such as external organizations, preparation programs, states, districts, or school sites themselves—can work with schools and districts to create social, ongoing, on-site, embedded-in-practice learning opportunities, including opportunities to learn about intentional and unintentional sensegiving, and to rehearse productive sensegiving. This would entail adding to the typical suite of professional development by taking administrators' and teachers' learning curriculum even further into practice than most implementation designs. In addition to developing formal structures within schools and districts to allow for such learning opportunities, it would entail working closely with partners to develop cultural-cognitive understandings and enactments of coordinated and continuously improving instruction. This might include working closely with a coach, a knowledgeable other more experienced with a particular system reform who could problem-solve with and model how to give sense in light of that district's or school's existing social system. Honig (2012) demonstrated how central office leaders engaged in such professional development with their principals to help build principals' instructional leadership capacity. Central office leaders need and deserve the same sorts of learning opportunities. This type of professional development would be costly (Cohen & Ball, 1999), including additional expenses to address more of partners' complex local contexts (e.g., districts' assessment systems, competing policies) with little support and possibly pushback from these contexts (Cohen et al., 2014). However, delving deeper into daily practice could connect more links in the complex chain between policy and practice (Cohen & Hill, 2001).

Implications for Policy and Practice

Policy makers also have a role to play in supporting local leaders with implementing equitable system reforms, and, thus, could also develop their own wells of knowledge on sensegiving and system reforms. Similar to intentional sensegiving, unintentional sensegiving can have significant consequences for whether and to what degree any instructional improvement effort is achieved. Since sensegiving draws on wells of knowledge about particular subjects, novel reforms are more likely to produce unintentional sensegiving. Thus, before administrators and other leaders attempt to lead a system reform, they deserve more opportunities to deepen their wells of knowledge. Leaders also need to communicate the same message, which means they must have opportunities to learn together in order to develop shared knowledge. With knowledge of how they can intentionally and unintentionally shape others' understandings and actions, leaders will be better equipped to send clear messages and provide effective guidance on how to shift instructional practice. Such knowledge is critical to help administrators and teachers make the cultural-cognitive shifts required

to enact their new roles and responsibilities within a coordinated and coherent instructional system. Absent clear sensegiving, they will construct other understandings and continue moving forward with their work, using these other understandings to guide their actions, actions that are not likely to actualize the system reform policy. Moreover, teachers and administrators will experience confusion, frustration, even fear, and this will influence their students' learning opportunities.

Conclusion

This paper extends the existing organizational studies literature on sensegiving by introducing the phenomenon of *unintentional sensegiving*, and demonstrating how unintentional sensegiving can undermine implementation efforts. Additionally, I classify three types—passive, partial, and ambiguous—which allows the nuances of unintentional sensegiving to be addressed during leadership professional learning opportunities. In this study, administrators' unintentional sensegiving traveled along hierarchical, connective paths to create dissimilar cultural-cognitive understandings and enactments of MTSS. Leaders deserved but did not have rich opportunities to develop their wells of knowledge for systemic change. Thus, they struggled with helping others shift their cultural-cognitive understandings and practices towards a more coordinated and coherent instructional system.

System reforms ask leaders, explicitly or implicitly, to change how they practice in major ways. Traditional understandings of administrative roles and responsibilities, including devolving responsibility for instruction to teachers, are no longer appropriate (Purkey & Smith, 1985; Smith & O'Day, 1991; Spillane, 2004). Administrators are tasked with working together across school, central office, and other organizational boundaries to construct and support coherent and continuously improving instructional systems. In other words, administrators are charged with changing their own and helping others change their cultural-cognitive understandings of how instruction is performed and managed. They must accomplish this task within politically and financially contentious circumstances. Further, because many schools and school systems are still designed to support traditional roles, administrators are likely constructing their new jobs within more traditionally organized social systems. Learning how to construct and lead a coherent instructional system requires learning (and possibly designing) a new job while trying to change the very social system of work that supports that job. Their work is only further challenged when they do not have the requisite knowledge they need to lead intentionally and effectively.

The hope and promise of equitable, ambitious system reforms continues to generate enthusiasm amongst policy makers, reformers, researchers, and educators. However, equitable education cannot stem from reforms that are inequitably implemented, in this case due to insufficient professional learning opportunities for administrators and teachers, poor communication, and competing policies. This study elucidates some of the challenges local educators face and inadvertently create in fulfilling the promise. Teachers and administrators deserve more support in changing the very organizations that govern their work and their students' learning opportunities. As we move forward, we must ensure that we are providing local educators with the support they deserve in their charge to equitably serve children.

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